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DIA INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT

COMMUNIST COURSES OF ACTION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA  
IN THE NEXT THIRTY DAYS

PURPOSE

This assessment examines in broad terms communist capabilities to undertake new, or "surprising," courses of action in Southeast Asia, primarily the Republic of Vietnam, within the next 30 days and those factors that would most likely influence Hanoi's war policy.

OVERVIEW

The enemy continues to maintain strong forces throughout Indochina, which are generally well supplied and equipped. The enclosed map details the enemy threat to the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). The Viet Cong (VC)/North Vietnamese Army (NVA) order of battle in high-threat areas in the RVN follows:

<u>Area</u>	<u>DIVS</u>	<u>REGTS</u>	<u>BNS</u>	<u>PERSONNEL</u>
NVN (S. of Vinh)	1	3	12	20-25,000
Northern MR-1	3	26	99	40-50,000 (30-40,000)*
B-3 Front	2	10	55	20-25,000
Northwest MR-3	2	8	46	12-17,000 ( 8-13,000)*

\* Best estimate after attrition and gains from replacements.

Communist forces in the RVN have scored significant gains since 30 March. They have seized Quang Tri Province in the far north, much of Quang Ngai/Binh Dinh in the coastal lowlands of southern MR-1 and northern MR-2, and conducted major operations in the Western Highlands of MR-2 and in northwestern MR-3. In so doing, an estimated 7,500 RVN Armed Forces (RVNAF) personnel have been killed, more than 25,000 wounded and more than 2,700 missing in action. Large numbers of tanks, trucks, and individual and crew-served weapons have also been lost and tens of thousands of refugees created.

The aforementioned gains, however, fall far short of the communists' objectives and of giving them the decisive edge over the RVNAF that they sought at the outset of the offensive.

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The capture of sizable portions of RVN territory has not carried with it control over major portions of the population, a principal communist objective and a sine qua non for any legitimate claim to representation. In addition, reported enemy casualties from all causes in the RVN since 30 March would be the equivalent of about five divisions, a loss that must have included many of the enemy's best officers, cadres, and troops in the RVN. Moreover, the US and RVNAF response to the offensive has strongly driven home to Hanoi that it not only underestimated the impact of the Vietnamization Program and RVN's ability to resist -- for example, at An Loc and Kontum City -- but the capability and willingness of the US to retaliate directly against the North Vietnam homeland. At this point, the VC/NVA appear "stuck" with their "offensive," with the prospects growing increasingly bright for the RVNAF in the short term. Over the next 30 days, communist pressure will remain most intense in MR-1, followed in descending order by MRs 2, 3, and 4. An assessment of enemy capabilities and probable courses of action by MR follows.

#### MILITARY REGION 1

The enemy threat in northern MR-1 is as shown previously. The city of Hue -- the primary communist objective -- is threatened by three divisional headquarters, 26 regimental headquarters and 99 battalions and the majority of the communists' estimated 70-80 operational tanks in the MR.

The VC/NVA are expected to maintain a high degree of pressure on the RVNAF in MR-1 during the next 30 days, especially in the northern sector where relatively clear, dry weather through August 1972 will allow greater mobility and resupply, subject, of course, to US air and naval interdiction operations. Moreover, since the fall of Quang Tri City on 1 May, the enemy has committed two regiments of the 325th Division to northern MR-1, and indications are that renewed major attacks in the Hue area are in the offing.

The communists, however, lack the capability to "surprise" Allied forces in the Hue area, and probably cannot capture Hue. At best Hanoi can only deploy five new regiments for an attack on a near-term basis, and then only if it draws on all of the maneuver regiments in the North Vietnamese Panhandle.

At this point, the communists face multiple problems in northern MR-1 -- 1) the necessity to contend with successful RVNAF counteroperations; 2) the necessity to

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defend captured territory; 3) personnel and materiel losses; and 4) the need for further planning and reorganization. In addition, the enemy must realize that renewed attacks on Hue will lack the punch of prior operations in the MR since he can no longer count on the same weight of effort as the heavy casualties taken since 30 March have decimated his best units. The 304th and 308th NVA Divisions, for example, are considered only marginal units. Much will depend on RVNAF aggressiveness, which has been steadily improving in the wake of President Thieu's replacement of key military officers with more competent types. At this point, Allied forces in northern MR-1 have the initiative, but there is little doubt that the communists are intent on launching a multidivision attack on Hue and possibly a multiregimental assault on Quang Ngai City. Their chances of seizing and holding either of these urban areas are slim.

#### MILITARY REGION 2

The enemy threat in MR-2 is greatest in Kontum/Pleiku Provinces, where two divisional headquarters, 10 regimental headquarters and about 55 battalions are targeted against Kontum City. Although total losses are unknown, the enemy has most likely been able to replace combat losses on a one-for-one basis by the infiltration of some 25,000 replacement troops before the offensive started. Nevertheless, the loss of experienced personnel -- in some cases units have suffered over 50 percent killed -- has severely degraded the enemy's combat capability. In the aftermath of unsuccessful efforts to maintain the interdiction of Route 19 between Pleiku and the coast and the abortive effort to seize Kontum City, the enemy has concentrated on refitting his infantry units and deploying artillery elements closer to Kontum City. Another large-scale effort is expected in this area to tie down RVNAF forces in the MR. In this regard, two regiments are maintaining the interdiction of Route 14 at Kontum Pass. Whatever the enemy's plans, he will only have favorable weather in the Highlands into July. Thereafter, heavy rains will severely restrict both maneuver and resupply capabilities to the point where main force units will have difficulty in mounting a major effort and armor and heavy equipment will be unable to support the attack effectively.

On the coast, elements of the 3d NVA Division are preparing to launch attacks into southern Binh Dinh Province. The District Capital of Phu My City is threatened; if the communists are successful there they would likely press on to Qui Nhon. If the 3d NVA Division continues moving farther south, it could become involved with the Republic of

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Korea forces, which the communists have avoided for the past three years.

Throughout MR-2, the enemy lacks the capability to surprise Allied forces. Except for isolated instances he has failed to achieve his announced goal of "liberating" the population of northern MR-2. Moreover, his reinforcement and logistic capabilities are limited.

Thus, the outlook for MR-2 during the next 30 days is fairly good. Muddy roads and impassable streams are already inhibiting communist operations in the Highlands, and the force structure is considered inadequate for the enemy to expand his area of control on the coast. In essence, except for sporadic surges, the enemy offensive in MR-2 has about ended.

#### MILITARY REGION 3

The major portion of the enemy forces threatening MR-3 is concentrated in the northwest in the Binh Long Province area -- two divisional headquarters, eight regimental headquarters and some 46 battalions.

Unlike MRs 1 and 2, enemy main forces in MR-3 are now actively disengaging and moving to (or are in) border areas, or have deployed to MR-4. The unsuccessful siege of An Loc was both a military and psychological defeat for the communists. Both the 5th and 9th VC Divisions (about 80 percent NVA) suffered heavy casualties and the 7th NVA Division only slightly less. Elements of the 7th NVA are still trying to keep Route 13 closed south of An Loc. Throughout the rest of MR-3, the VC/NVA have either been unable to launch significant attacks, or, as in Phuoc Tuy, have been forced back on the defensive. With a near-term negligible reinforcement capability, high losses to Allied combined arms, and weather already impeding ground force maneuver, the enemy's offensive in MR-3 -- blunted at An Loc -- is considered to be largely over.

#### MILITARY REGION 4

The enemy threat in the MR-4 border area consists of two divisional headquarters and eight regimental headquarters and some 36 battalions. The best combat capability exists in the northern portion where the VC/NVA are attempting to open traditional infiltration corridors to populous areas -- through Kien Giang Province by the Phouc Long Front (aka

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1st NVA Division) from Cambodia and through Parrot's Beak in Kien Tuong Province by the 5th VC Division which has moved there from An Loc. Both of these enemy units have, however, been severely mauled in prior engagements, and the enemy may well be forced to commit the 7th NVA and 9th VC Divisions. Even so, the combat capability of all these communist units will remain limited, and the RVNAF is considered able to hold losses to the minimum.

In summary, enemy gains in MR-4 will probably be limited as a result of an RVNAF decision to redeploy more forces into the Delta to oppose current threats and to secure areas the enemy holds. Weather, of course, will limit enemy main force operations in the next month or so. As in MR-3, the rains have already begun, and mobility will become more and more restricted. If the enemy chose to deploy enough forces to the Delta to engage in prolonged combat, the RVNAF could meet the threat. Thus, no particular "surprise" or imminent enemy gains are expected in MR-4 in the near term.

#### POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the limited evidence available -- mainly from public statements by the Hanoi regime and a small number of clandestine reports -- North Vietnam adheres to its essential war aims. US air and naval operations have, however, impressed the North Vietnamese with the fact that the US is determined to meet its commitments to the RVN and prevent any communist takeover. Moreover, US military operations have showed the North Vietnamese people that they are essentially isolated, notwithstanding the pledges of their communist allies. These factors, in combination with the knowledge that the US President has recently visited Moscow and Peking and that Dr. Kissinger has visited Peking might well give Hanoi pause.

North Vietnamese options are, however, limited. Hanoi can ask for a cease-fire (perhaps "in place" in hopes of holding what it has). Secondly, Hanoi could seek to soften the terms of the US Presidential peace offer of 8 May -- as has already been hinted. Thirdly, Hanoi could choose to continue down the same road in hopes that "a turn for the better" in US domestic politics would somehow allow it to gain the victory that has heretofore been denied. "Capitulation" by North Vietnam is considered out of the question.

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In view of the damage being inflicted by Allied military operations, the small successes in the RVN during the current offensive, and the reluctance of the PRC and the USSR to challenge the US, the Hanoi regime could ask for a cease-fire in place within the next 30-days. Hanoi might hope that this would result in the withdrawal of all US forces from Southeast Asia. Hanoi probably believes that continuing subversion against the Thieu government would result in its collapse and the installation of a successor administration more to Hanoi's liking. It is hard to visualize, however, such a fundamental change in North Vietnamese policy within the next 30-days -- barring international considerations springing from US diplomacy. Odds over the short term, therefore, are for North Vietnam to continue its present policies over the next 30-days.

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